



TRIBONYX MORTIERI, *Du Bus.*

Mortier's Tribonyx.

Tribonyx Mortierii, Du Bus. Bull. Acad. Sci. Brux., tom. vii. p. 215. pl.—G. R. Gray, List of Gen. of Birds, 2nd Edit. p. 92.—List of Birds in Brit. Mus. Coll., Part III. p. 122.

Brachytrallus ralloides, Lafres. ?

Native Hen, of the Colonists.

THIS bird is rather abundantly dispersed over Van Diemen's Land, but from the extreme shyness of its disposition, and the low swampy and almost inaccessible nature of the situations it frequents, it is seldom seen by ordinary observers. The localities it affects are marsh lands and the sedgy banks of rivers and ponds. It was daily seen by me during my stay on the Government demesne at New Norfolk, where it frequently left its sedgy retreats and walked about the paths and other parts of the garden, with tail erect like the Common Hen; even here, however, the greatest circumspection and quietude were necessary to obtain a sight of it, for the slightest noise or movement excited its suspicions, and in an instant it vanished in the most extraordinary manner into some thicket, from which it did not again emerge until all apparent cause for alarm was past.

The sternum and pectoral muscles of this bird are but feebly developed in proportion to its bulk, and it consequently rarely resorts to flight; on the other hand, the legs and thighs are extremely large, and hence its power of running is very great, and upon this power it mainly depends for security from molestation. Its habits and general manners are very similar to those of the Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) of Europe, but it does not dive or swim so much as that bird. It is very easily captured with a common horsehair noose, by which means some of my specimens were procured.

The male is about three pounds in weight; and the stomachs of those I examined were extremely thick and muscular, and contained aquatic plants and insects, gravel, &c.

The nest, which is very similar to that of the Moorhen, is formed of a bundle of rushes placed on the border of the stream; the eggs, which are also similar to those of the Moorhen, are seven in number, two inches and an eighth long, one inch and a half broad, and of a stone colour marked all over with thinly dispersed, irregularly shaped, and variously sized spots and blotches of dark chestnut-brown.

The sexes are alike in appearance, but the female is somewhat smaller and less brilliant in colour than the male.

All the upper surface greyish olive, washed with chestnut-brown on the head, back of the neck, back, and the tips of the secondaries; primaries blackish brown; tail deep black; under surface bluish slate-colour, passing into black on the abdomen and under tail-coverts; flank-feathers largely tipped with white, forming a conspicuous mark on each side; thighs purplish grey; irides orange-red; bill greenish yellow; legs and feet leaden yellow.

The figures are of the natural size.